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OUR PROFESSOR.

—:O:—

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

A PROFESSOR.

—

COSTUMES. — MODERN

—

PROPERTIES.

Drawing-room furniture—including a large centre table, with cover, on which are books of various sorts and sizes, papers, a decanter of water, and a tumbler. Wooden eggs of various sizes—two with fine strings attached. Prospectuses.

—

EXPLANATION OF THE STAGE DIRECTIONS.

R., means first entrance right, and right. L., first entrance left, and left. S.E.R., second entrance right. S.E.L., second entrance left. T.E.R., third entrance right. T.E.L., third entrance left. F.E.R., fourth entrance right. F.E.L., fourth entrance left. U.E.R., upper entrance right. U.E.L., upper entrance left. R.F., right flat. L.F., left flat. R.C., right of centre. L.C., left of centre. C., centre. C.D., centre doors. C.R., centre towards right. C.L., centre towards left. Observing you are supposed to face the audience.

TMP96-006437

OUR PROFESSOR.

SCENE.—*A Drawing-Room. Large centre table, with cover, on which are books, etc., a decanter of water, and a tumbler.*

The PROFESSOR is discovered seated at the table, excitedly turning over several loose sheets of paper. After a few moments he rises slowly and with great dignity, and makes the customary bow. He is in evening dress.

Professor. Ladies and gentlemen—hum, hum—(*drinks water*)—ladies and gentlemen, the proprietor of this establishment has intrusted me with an important and glorious task. Through my earnest solicitations, he has allowed me to open this social evening with a few words of instruction upon the elementary and most indispensable precepts of elocution, to be given in the short space of time to which an amiable but firm manager has strictly limited me. (*Smiling blandly.*) I solicit, therefore, your kind attention, and, without further preamble, I will begin my lecture. (*Pours out a tumbler of water, drinks, coughs, blows his nose, appears as if collecting his thoughts, and then commences.*) Ladies and gentlemen: La Fontaine, who was a bad father but an incomparable fabulist, has written somewhere that life was a comedy in one hundred acts; and after him Balzac gave the name of “*Comédie Humaine*” to a series of admirable essays on modern society. In fact, the world is but a vast stage, upon which we are each called upon to act, with more or less success, the part that blind Fortune casts us for. Thus, we are all born

actors. Actors, ladies and gentlemen, (*flourishing about his arms*) and our first step is taken upon the stage of Life. "In the chaos of an alluring world, each event is but a play, each one of us an actor." (*Drinks.*) If from a general view, we descend to details, we may observe that besides the *comedian by nature*, there is the *comedian by profession*. (*Draws himself grandly up, as if he were referring to himself.*) The comedian by profession is more commonly known under the name of—(*smiling most blandly all round his auditory*)—a-a-c-tor! from the Latin *agere, actum*, from which comes *act, action*. (*Counting his fingers.*) He belongs to every age, and to one or the other sex. (*Coughs.*) One of the other sex is called an actress. The actor's mission is to interpret by word, act, and expression, the feelings and passions given by the dramatic author to his characters. He must, therefore, have the power to be, by turns, tender, cruel, reckless, violent, passionate, calm, threatening, gentle, terrible, affectionate, persuasive, solemn, desperate, joyful, melancholy, noble, dignified, sublime, ideal, vicious, corrupt, degraded, ignoble, abject, and repulsive. (*Increasing in volubility and tone of utterance as he approaches the end.*) Moreover, to be an actor, it is not enough that he should be endowed with natural gifts only; he must develop them by constant and assiduous study of his art. Thus we can say: "A man is born a comedian, but makes himself an actor. *Homo nascitur histrio, fit actor.*" (*Blows his nose violently, and scans his audience quickly and nervously for approbation, which receiving, he smiles and bows low repeatedly.*) The actor is often drawn to the stage by an irresistible feeling that it is his vocation. Thus we see him spring from every condition of life, from the palace as from the humblest cabin. Nero was an emperor, Shakespeare was a poacher, Molière was an upholsterer, Vavasour was an umbrella vender; I, myself, had it not been for the ardent passion which has thrown me into the arms of Melpomene, should doubtless have followed my father's footsteps—who was an old soldier, guard of a monument in my native village—where I should have spent my peaceful days, and earned thirty-two pounds a year. The actor is generally impressionable, affable, modest, free from jealousy, and especially kind to those belonging to his own profession. (*Natural voice.*) There are exceptions, however, which only prove—but too clearly—the rule. I am, for example, a victim to these exceptions. I do not wish to speak ill of any one. No, no, ladies and gentlemen, that is not my way; (*then speaks very confidentially*) but I was obliged to leave the Odeon, as Mr. Bullard obstinately refused to give me any part, and, had it not been for base intriguing, which always prevented my getting an engagement there, I should have long ago shared the honor with Mr. Goddard of being a principal actor at the Theatre Royal. (*Increasing in volume of tone towards the end, and then in somewhat of an apologetic manner.*) However, I do not accuse any one. (*Again adopts the voice of a Professor.*) As I have already told you, the actor must express by voice, gesture, and the expression of his face the sentiments brought into

action by the author. I shall, therefore, treat successively of the voice, of *gesture*, and of *physiognomy*. First, the voice. What is the voice? The voice is a sound that comes from the mouth. (*Smiles.*) What is the *mouth*? It is that larger or smaller orifice which is placed between the nose and chin. (*Smiles.*) The mouth is composed of lips, gums, palate, and teeth—more or less; it corresponds with those different organs by which sound is formed, propagated, developed, transmitted. These organs are the lungs, the glottis, the epiglottis, the larynx, the wind-pipe (that I call the gallery of the mouth), the gullet, the uvula, and finally the tongue—in Latin, *lingua, linguæ*. These different organs, the tongue in particular, acquire by continued exercise and constant habit, a flexibility, an elasticity, a mobility, and a solidity entirely incomparable. It is for this reason that we often meet women who talk from morning till night without interruption; recommence the next day at daylight, and continue in this occupation to the most advanced age. (*Coughs, drinks water, wipes his lips and his forehead, then placing his fingers and thumbs of each hand on the table, he leans forward.*) The voice should always come from the chest. (*Strikes his chest hard with both hands.*) That's where we get it! Those who think they produce a better effect by making it come from the abdomen, by stifling it with the throat, or by letting it pass through the nose, (*speaks through his nose*) follow a very bad method. (*To a lady.*) Would you be so kind, madam, as to place your ear against my back, and you will see at once. You do not like to? Don't wonder at it! Do not blush, madam, I beg; such modesty is to your credit. Such being the case I will continue. (*Bows.*) Language is pronounced. To speak well, one must pronounce well. The art of elocution has for its primary and principal object the correction of all defects of pronunciation. There is a little work in which I have treated this matter *ex professo*. (*Draws from his pocket a small volume which he places on the table.*) It can be obtained on very reasonable terms. I have divided these defects into two categories, viz., the *total disability* and the *partial prohibitive*. A *total disability* is dumbness from birth. The dumb do not speak. (*Looks round for approval—then slowly and with trembling voice.*) Nature, so prodigal of its gifts to others, has shown herself most cruel to them. She would have made them the most miserable of beings if she had not, besides this infirmity with which she had inflicted them, added another—deafness. The dumb are generally deaf. They, at any rate, can feel no bitterness at their inability to reply to words which they do not hear! (*Much affected, and blowing his nose with a loud noise.*) I will cite as an example of the *accidental total disability*, the ablation or amputation of the tongue. Why, when children obstinately refuse to speak, are they asked if they have lost their tongues? Because the man who has lost his tongue is not able to speak, and, would you believe it, never will speak. *Stammering* or *stuttering*! (*Coughs, and shakes his head learnedly.*) *Stammering* is an affliction which renders acting impossible. Agamemnon never

could have aroused Arcas in *this manner*: (*Illustrates pedantically*) "Ye—ye—yes, it is—it is—it is Aga—ga—ga—ga—gammemon!" No actor could ever disjoint syllables in this mercilessly cold-blooded manner without being hissed. The principal inconveniences of stuttering, lisping, &c., are to give to the most dramatic things a comic turn, to delay movements and action to a singular extent, and to prolong the performance of a play beyond the usual time. (*His fingers on the table, he leans forward and smiles most graciously.*) It is well to remark, by-the-bye, that female stutterers are *extremely rare*; and that those people afflicted with this defect never stutter while singing. Therefore I advise all stutterers, who have a strong desire to become actors, to devote themselves to the opera. I purposely omit defects of minor importance, such as speaking too quickly, a thick utterance, bad emphasis, talking through the nose, slowness of speech, etc. All these partial prohibitives come from a bad condition or use of the tongue. I can make a radical cure of them in a few lessons, thanks to certain graduated exercises contained in my book; thanks also, and above all, to these eggs, the idea of which originated with Demosthenes, and of which I am the inventor and sole possessor. (*Draws from his pocket several wooden eggs of different sizes, and puts them in a row on the table.*) Ladies and gentlemen, you see here several wooden eggs of different sizes, to which I have given the name of ovoid-galvano-liugno-regenerators. These eggs are furnished at their two extremities with small galvanic plates, and present on the largest part of their ovoid sphericity, a slight flatness which facilitates their introduction into the mouth and the placing of them in the soft concavities of the buccal appendages. The size varies according to the dimensions of the orifice. Here are small ones for young parts, here middle-sized ones for the first parts, then larger ones for singers. (*Shows an enormous one.*) This one has been of great service to Salvini, and this I intend (*another still larger*) for Jananschek, in case she should wish to complete her pronunciation after my system. The manner of correcting one of the defects that I have just cited, is simply to introduce into my mouth two of these eggs, which I adroitly push towards the internal sides of my cheeks with my tongue, as thus—(*Puts one of the eggs into his mouth, which he very nearly swallows—coughs, gets red in the face, strangles—in a choked voice.*) This is an accident which I strongly recommend you to avoid. Moreover it is a very easy thing. All you have to do is to hold the end of a fine thread, which you first tie around the egg in this way: if it should slip down the throat (*gesture of pulling string*) it would be easy to get it back. Are any of you, ladies and gentlemen, afflicted with a partial prohibitive? Then I cannot too strongly recommend the use of my ovoids, which will conquer the most obstinate defect. These can be bought or hired, with or without subscription. (*Draws from his pocket prospectuses, which he puts on the table.*) I do not insist upon it. Now a word

upon gesture, carriage, and physique. (*Hears a knock behind the scenes.*) Ah, (*smiles*) my time presses, and our good manager is getting impatient, so I shall treat of these in a body and very briefly. The actor, above all things, should possess the free and entire use of all his different members. He may be called upon to simulate deformities, but as these deformities vary according to the character he represents, it is necessary that he should not, in reality, be afflicted with them. On the contrary, he should be, as far as possible, young, handsome, tall, slight. (*Stands erect and throws out his chest, as if he were illustrating for himself.*) Thus it will be easier for him, if necessary, to employ every artifice for making himself look older, or shorter, or uglier, than to become handsome if he is naturally ugly, or young if he is very old. (*Grimaces and contorts by way of illustration—Erect.*) The gesture, bearing, and physiognomy should always be in perfect harmony with the age, position, character, and feelings of the person represented. Familiar gestures also should be indulged in, in great moderation. Never, for example, to dig the speaker in the stomach unless the situation absolutely requires it. Another important piece of advice is, never to yield to any individual habit or feeling when upon the stage; repress strongly any desire to sneeze, expectorate, cough, blow your nose, or scratch yourself, no matter how imperative the desire or how excessive may be the itching. (*Renewed knocks behind the scenes.*) I must now leave off; and yet it is very necessary that I should express to you by the aid of gestures, bearing, and physiognomy, the various sentiments with which the soul is affected. If our worthy manager would—(*Runs to door where knocks were heard, and speaks through the key-hole, at the end of each sentence places his ear to key-hole to receive the reply.*) Mr. Manager, grant me two minutes more—only two minutes! No, no, not another one, I promise. (*Comes forward again rapidly.*) That's all right! You are not to be robbed of the pleasure of listening to me! No, no, no, I mean I am not to be debarred the felicity of addressing you! (*Smiles.*) In the first place, Joy! (*Gesture.*)

"Yes, since I have again found so faithful a friend—"

You see, I am joyful! I have found a faithful friend once more, and I am joyful; it is quite clear. (*Pause.*) Don't you see it? You do? Well, then, applaud. Sorrow! (*Gesture.*)

"I am very unhappy."

I should now have an unhappy air; at sight of me one should say at once, "How unhappy he looks!" (*Walks and illustrates—after a while, applause, which he waits for.*) That's right! Anger! (*Gesture.*)

"I desire two words with you, Count."

I frown, the muscles of my face contract. Do you see the muscles

on my face? My fist doubles. Do you note my fist doubling? I can scarcely contain myself. (*Stamps, &c.*) Then my fury abates, and I am wrapped in bitter—Sadness! (*Gesture.*)

“How the times are changed!”

Loving-tenderness succeeds this mood:

“Chloe, you weep.”

Then I become indignant. (*Gesture.*)

“Oh, heaven, to think that men can so degrade themselves.”

I am struck with terror. (*Gesture—Runs backward, shaking his extended hands.*)

“What horror comes over me, oh, ye gods! What rivers of blood flow around me!”

Now I implore! Just look at me! Mark how I implore! (*Gesture.*)

“Mercy for him!”

You will observe here that I show you at the same time how to fall on your knees gracefully—which is not an easy thing to do. (*Falls on one knee—dramatic attitude.*) I die, and this is the hardest of all. (*Lies on his side.*) It is over, I am dead! (*Remains stretched out and motionless for an instant. For the third time the knocks are renewed—The Professor jumps up precipitately, runs to table, snatches up the various objects which he placed there upon entering, stuffs them hurriedly into his pockets, and smiling, approaches footlights.*) Ladies and gentlemen, I have only time to teach you the art of bowing gracefully.

(*Exit backwards, bowing right and left.*)

CURTAIN.

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